

A P O L O G Y

F O R

The WRITERS against the Tragedy
of DOUGLAS.

W I T H

Some REMARKS on that Play.

*Canst thou be such a vain mistaken thing,
To wish thy works may make a playhouse ring
With the unthinking laughter, and poor praise,
Of fops and ladies, factious for thy plays?
Then send a cunning friend to learn thy doom,
From the shrewd judges in the drawing-room.*

ROCHESTER.

EDINBURGH:

Printed in the year MDCCLVII.

(Price Two Pence.)

Y O G O L O Y

T O R

The WRITERS of the Tragedy
of Douglas

W I T H

Some REMARKS on that Play.

Canst thou be such a vain trifler
To write thy works may make a playhouse ring
With the rattling language, and poor praise,
Of fools and ladies, fustians for the stage?
Then send a cunning friend to learn thy doom,
From the learned judges in the drawing room.

ROCKINGHAM.

EDINBURGH:

Printed in the year MDCCCLVII.

Price Two Pence

A P O L O G Y

F O R

The WRITERS against the Tragedy of DOUGLAS.

IT is at present often, and justly observed, that the tragedy of *Douglas* has given birth to more burlesque performances, than any occurrence in *Scotland* ever did. Most of the authors of these pieces lurk as unsuspected as they could wish; but some of them are known. As the friends of *Douglas* have thought proper to attack its enemies with private backbiting and calumny, and ascribed their writings to the most ungentlemanly designs; it is hoped, the public will allow them to explain at some length their true motives, and justify their own conduct, by making a few observations on that play and its admirers.

It has been said, That “spite and envy induced us to ridicule this tragedy; and that our sole aim was to damp the rising genius of its author.” We must be forgiven to say, that this insinuation is as false as it is injurious. We would have rejoiced to see a countryman of ours excel in tragedy. We indeed are sorry that a *Scotch* clergyman has written a play; but we would have admired the tragedy, had it been
A good,

good, though we thought it blameable in the author to write one; as *Cæsar* liked the treason, though he hated the traitor.

Some years ago, a few gentlemen in this town assumed the character of being the only judges in all points of literature; they were and still are styled the *geniuses*, and lately erected what they called a *select society*, which usurps a kind of aristocratical government over all men and matters of learning. The first and fundamental maxim of this dictatorial club is, That a punctilious correctness of style is the *summum bonum* of all compositions: though the greatest genius should shine throughout a work, yet if in it is found an unguarded expression, a slip in syntax, or a peccadillo in grammar, *ad piper et farras* with it. Hence *Shakespear* of late is so much decried, that a noted historian, the *Coryphæus* of this society, when disapproving of a wretched sentiment, adds, "What could *Shakespear* have said worse *?" ADDISON, till those gentlemen appeared, was universally esteemed as the finest writer ever *England* produced; but they

Cast him like an useless weed away.

If you believe them, there are ten errors in every page of his *Spectators*; and the above-mentioned author has a copy of them, in which this decalogue of errors in every page is marked with his own hand. They have taken so great pains to inculcate this doctrine, that now every boy at school, if you praise Mr *Addison*, will perk it

* *David Hume*, Esq; in his history of *Great Britain*, vol. 1. in a note, has these words.

in your face, and tell you, that he is not a *correct* writer. Who can, without indignation, behold these men thus corrupting the taste of the country? A punctilious correctness, no doubt, is an accomplishment: but it is no more; nothing is more easily acquired; every blockhead who has the patience to read over dictionaries, grammars, and spelling-books, may atchieve it. But to unite fancy with judgment, the simple with the sublime, and strength of expression with delicacy of thought, is the birthright of him alone

*Quem tu, Melpomene, semel
Nascentem placido lumine videris.*

It would be improper to spend more time upon a proposition so plain as this is. Let the reader compare *Voltaire* and *Hume*, with *Shakespear* and *Addison*, and give the preference to the former, if he can.

The Reverend author of *Douglas* was a worthy member of this society; and his tragedy, long before it appeared in public, was, by this society, extolled with all the noise of declamation; and the little merit it has, exaggerated with all the amplifications of bombast. A famous author whom I have mentioned more than once, said, in private, that "he would give the *English* 200 years " past, and 200 years to come, and they would " not be able to produce such another tragedy:" and the same gentleman has publicly told his namesake, that "he possesses the true theatrical " genius of *Shakespear* and *Otway*, refined from " the unhappy barbarism of the one, and licen-

“ tioufness of the other*.” This author must be forgiven for these rhodomontades; for he frankly owns, that “ it is less my admiration of
 “ your fine genius, which has engaged me to
 “ make this address to you, than my esteem of
 “ your character, and *my affection to your per-*
 “ *son.*” Love, we all know, is blind; and it would be unpolite to blame *Corydon* for running out extravagantly in the praises of *Alexis*. Perhaps the same apology will serve for another learned gentleman, who averred, that “ this was
 “ the best tragedy in *English* : but indeed,
 “ (added he) this is no great compliment ; for
 “ we have no tragedies in *English*.”

What mighty things have not been done by puffing? †

We had seen several poems by the author of *Douglas*; which, in the opinion of most people, were very poor ones; one of them particularly ‡ is perhaps the worst poem ever was written in this country by a man of a liberal education: and it seemed not a little paradoxical to us, that this author’s muse, who had miscarried so often, should have, for her first perfect birth, an *Herculean* boy. When we saw this play acted, our expectations were fully answered. Though the friends of the author had puffed it away as a perfect tragedy, yet the very first night convinced them, and every body else, that it was *cross’d and divided with strange-coloured absurdities*; many of which were struck out of it then, and more

* See the celebrated dedication, p. 4.

† See *Foot’s Tea*.

‡ The subject of it is a building near *Inverary*.

afterwards, when it was re-reformed at *London*; so that, in one sense, this author has shone *more and more unto the perfect day*. The partisans of *Douglas* maintain, that it is the most perfect tragedy ever was written, and infinitely superior to any tragedy of *Shakespear's*. We, on the other hand, admit it to be a tolerable modern tragedy: but we contend, that he who likens this author to *Shakespear*, might as well (to use the words of a correct writer) compare a molehill to *Teneriffe*, or a pond to the ocean *. The play is at length printed; and the public will judge which of the two opinions is most agreeable to truth.

One of the puffers of *Douglas* says in the newspaper, That, in the *Greek* drama, “no subordinate events are introduced, but what immediately tend to the completion of the principal design: That a play conducted upon this plan, must want the principal requisite to take hold of the minds of an *English* assembly of spectators; and these observations (he says) explain why *Douglas* has not been received with the same warmth with which the ingenious dedicatior deservedly speaks of it.” It is not my intention to examine the plot with a scrupulous severity; but I would beg to know, what brings *John of Lorn* into the tragedy of *Douglas*? “Who the devil is this *Lardella*?” Does what is said about him *tend to the completion of the principal design*? Every body must see the intention of this; and most people will readily believe, that the success this play has had, is owing, in a great measure, to this absurd

* See the *Essay on taste*, p. 210. of the four late dissertations.

and extrinsic episode. Well might the author say,

—————*Flattery direct*

*Rarely disgusts ; they little know mankind .
Who doubt its operation ; 'tis my key,
And opes the wicket of the human heart. **

The beginning of the 2d Act, is, to a plain man, absolutely unintelligible. In the *dramatis personæ*, as represented at *Edinburgh*, we find

STRANGER. Mr HEYMAN.

Now, it is certain, that here Mr *Heyman* played the shepherd, who is not called the stranger, but the prisoner. In the beginning of this 2d Act, *enter servants and a stranger at one door*. Who is this stranger? The servants say,

*This man with outcry wild has call'd us forth,
So sore afraid he cannot speak his fears.*

A very odd stranger this! Like *Shirley* in the *Rehearsal*, he knows not what to say, or what to do. When we turn the leaf, we find a third stranger, who turns out to be *Norval*; but who the other stranger may be, is a mystery, to explain which, we stand in need of a revelation from *David Hume*, Esq; or some other person of as uncommon sense. The scene betwixt Lady *Randolph* and the shepherd is much admired; but surely the *reconnoissance* by jewels is so hackneyed, that it merits no applause. The scene betwixt

* See *Douglas*, p. 41.

Lord *Randolph* and *Glenalvon* is poorly executed. The Baron enters saying,

'Tis so, by heav'n.

This, and what follows, shews, that *Glenalvon* had been openly and avowedly persuading and arguing him into jealousy. *Shakespear* has managed in a very different manner. *Iago* utters nothing but what is extorted from him; and the reader is intreated to compare this scene with that in *Othello* upon the same subject; as also the quarrel of *Brutus* and *Cassius*, with that of *Glenalvon* and *Douglas*. It does not clearly appear, how Lord *Randolph* or *Glenalvon* got the assignation into their hands. *Glenalvon* talks of employing a servant; but this he does very obscurely: it is not easy to see how he could use him after he was turned off. This, like all the material business of the play, is transacted behind the scenes.

As to the characters: That of Lady *Randolph* (*alias Barnet*) is tolerably kept up. But her tenderness for her son is irreconcilable with the treatment he met with from her as soon as he was born. She sends him and his nurse, in a dark stormy night, through the *Carron*, when there was all the probability in the world that they would both perish; and the nurse actually did. This conduct was certainly next to child-murder. Nothing can be more absurd than to make her say,

—Had thy fond mother fear'd
The loss of thee—

And yet immediately to add, that she had no hopes of his being alive; because when she sent him away,

—It was dark December, wind and rain
Had beat all night, &c.

Her grief is altogether *outré*. It is incredible, that any woman would bewail a husband so long; and it is still more inconceivable, that she should receive no comfort from the embraces of a second. The authors of the *Fatal Marriage* and *Distress'd Mother* have avoided this absurdity. *Isabella* mourns but seven years, and she had many misfortunes to struggle with; and *Andromache* does not continue so long a widow. The author of *Douglas* seems to be sensible, that it was unnatural to make a woman's grief last for eighteen or twenty years; and he endeavours to lay the blame on the *fatal day* which *stirs* her *time-settled sorrow*. But Lord *Randolph* tells her,

Seven long years
Are pass'd since we were join'd by sacred ties;
Clouds all the while have hung upon your brow,
Nor broke nor parted by one gleam of joy.

And she herself says, that, during the interval betwixt *Douglas's* death and her marriage with Lord *Randolph*,

————Melancholy had congeal'd my blood.

There is nothing striking in Lord *Randolph's* character, but his wish that his wife had

Pride, anger, vanity————

Glenalvon is a very bad imitation of *Iago*. It is monstrous to make him over head and ears in love with *Lady Randolph*, whom we *must* suppose to be about forty years of age, and worn out with grief and sorrow. When this objection was first started, the champions for *Douglas* said, that she bore him when she was only fourteen years old. "You *may* suppose, Sir, what you please;" but I hope you will take the Lady's own word for it, that she was old. She informs you, that

*In the cold bosom of the earth is lodg'd,
Mangled with wounds, the husband of my YOUTH.*

And afterwards she says, she was in the *autumn* of her years. I humbly think she has made it pretty plain now. I have heard these gentlemen say, that there is nothing absurd in falling in love with an old woman. This makes me begin to consider as serious, a pamphlet which I hitherto took to be jocular, and to be of its opinion, that there is a propensity in young men towards old women, which is restrained by the text, which says, *Thou shalt not lie with thy grandmother*. This absurdity is not to be found either in the *Fatal Marriage* or *Distress'd Mother*; and no body will be surpris'd that *Iago* should fall in love with *Desdemona*. It is not easy to tell, why the shepherd should be made to blame himself for the unhappy fate of *Douglas*. For, in the *first* place, he could not reveal to *Douglas* his birth, which he himself did not know; and, *2dly*, Had he been able to do it, yet it was not expedient: For he had all the rea-

son in the world to believe, from the situation in which he found the child, that his parents wanted to be quit of him. And the truth is, that had *Douglas's* birth not been discovered, he might have returned

In peace and safety to his pleasant home.

The character of DOUGLAS is woefully bungled. There is a dreadful noise made about him in the prologue: But, alas!

Quid dignum tanto fert hic promissor hiatu?

The most you can say for him is, that he was in a fair way to have been a hero, but died in ap-
parency.

As to the sentiments, those of Lady *Randolph* are commonly tender; but they flag prodigiously when she discovers herself to her son:

*Image of DOUGLAS! fruit of fatal love,
All that I owe thy sire I pay to thee.*

This is both flat and ridiculous. The love of a husband and of a son are widely different. Any man that considers how long this lady had mourned for her husband, will not think her much in his debt. DOUGLAS takes these words in a gallantish sense, and makes her a very fine compliment on her beauty:

*But did my sire surpass the rest of men,
As thou excellest all of womankind?*

And she very coquettishly apologises to him for not being handsomer.

The

The following passage is quite out of character:

—My lov'd Lord was call'd
To fight his father's battles, and with him,
In spite of all my tears, would MALCOLM go.

Ought not her tears to have been employed to keep her husband from the battle? Though a multitude of impious sentiments were expunged, yet many still remain. I shall only mention one or two. Lord Randolph says,

*There is a destiny in this strange world,
Which oft decrees an undeserved doom,
Let schoolmen tell us why—*

When Lady Randolph died, she lifted up
—her head

*And her white hands to heav'n, seeming to say,
Why am I forc'd to this?*

How different is Ophelia's death! She indeed drowns herself, but the excess of her grief had bereaved her of her judgment. *Shakespeare*, poor old *Shakespeare*, says, that when she fell into the water,

*Her cloaths spread wide,
And, mermaid-like, a while they bore her up;
Which time she chaunted remnants of old lauds,
As one incapable of her distress.*

But Lady Randolph dies like a virago who had carefully perused the late essay on SUICIDE.

The last thing to be considered is the diction. It has been extolled as simple; but, alas! it is
B 2 simple

simple to a fault. There is a flaw in the diction of the first speech in the play.

— *If departed ghosts
Are e'er permitted to review this world.*

We who are at present in this world, know very well that life

— *can little more supply,
Than just to look about us and to die.*

But ghosts have done both already; and if ever they revisit this world, they certainly do not come out of curiosity, but upon business of importance. It is easy to smoke the parson in the style of this play; *the King-of kings, the blessed cross*, and the frequent prayers make the cloven foot appear rather too often. The following expressions are very improper.

*I'll give it him refitted for his master,
Which way the current of your temper sets.*

And there are many such. But the pleasantest passage in the whole play is put in the hero's mouth.

*May Heav'n inspire some fierce gigantic Dane
To give a bold defiance to our host.
Before he speaks it out, I will accept.*

This is a very close imitation of the celebrated line in our version of the Psalms:

Be silent, but speak out.

The

The description of the *Bass* is execrable ;

*The sea-rock immense,
Amazing Bass, looks o'er a fertile land.*

though it must be confessed there is one line in
the play,

Which stands unrival'd in the rolls of fame.

And it is this,

But when the matter match'd his mighty mind.

“ What could *Shakespear* have said worse ? ” He
would not have expressed himself so : for he has
ridiculed this *alliteratio* with great drollery, in his
Midsummer night's dream :

— *With blade, with bloody blameful blade,
He bravely broach'd his boiling bloody breast.*

And so has Mr *Bramston* in the *Man of taste*.

Nor barb'rous birch e'er brush'd my tender bum.

Upon the whole, we were so far from at-
tempting

To crush down to the ground a lovely plant,
that we have only endeavoured to trample on a
poppy, which would fain pass for a rose.